



## Chapter 2

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Increase community engagement and support for Foster Care Review Boards by identifying and measuring quality indicators.
- Build a human resource development system which recruits, trains, and supports a qualified, high-performing workforce. Increased effectiveness and efficiency in this area can save the department an estimated \$4.2 million annually.
- Increase occupancy rate for more effective utilization of our Youth Development Center system. The increased efficiency and effectiveness resulting from this initiative could save an estimated \$4.4 million annually.

### INTRODUCTION

The Tennessee Department of Children's Services (DCS) was established by the Tennessee Legislature in 1996. It was formed by combining children's service functions from six state departments, including Human Services, Youth Development, Mental Health, Education, Finance and Administration and Health. DCS protects children who are victims of abuse or neglect and strengthens families through services that focus on family support and preservation.

DCS administers services in three program areas: Child Protective Services, Child Welfare Services and Juvenile Justice.

Child Protective Services investigates cases of abuse or neglect. The division oversees the DCS hotline call center, evaluates child safety through investigation and

assessment, determines resources or services needed, and places children in care.

Child Welfare Services works to bring permanency to each child by managing child custody arrangements, administering adoption services and providing child and family support.

The Division of Juvenile Justice serves youth who have committed delinquent offenses. Services range from community diversion to custodial care. The department currently operates five Youth Development Centers (YDCs) across the state.

## APPROACH/METHODOLOGY

DCS partnered with the Casey Foundation to prepare surveys and compile data for the department's Top to Bottom Review. The review examined the department's mission, operations and relationships with constituents, employees and key stakeholders.

Areas of focus included:

- Is DCS's mission appropriate for state government?
- In what areas can DCS be more effective?
- In what areas can DCS be more efficient?
- How can DCS better partner with other agencies and organizations to meet the needs of Tennesseans?

Research was gathered through a series of 14 focus groups comprised of 114 participants, 56 in-depth interviews among a cross section of stakeholders, and a suite of web surveys completed by more than 3,875 employees, stakeholders and influencers. There was broad representation from across the state with an emphasis placed on ensuring diversity of input (e.g. staff at every level, stakeholders in urban, rural and remote areas).

To encourage candor, the Casey Foundation gathered the data. Respondents' names and specific comments were kept in confidence. Commissioner Kathryn O'Day also engaged in conversations during regional visits with legislators and other elected officials, district attorneys, law enforcement professionals and partners.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** Develop and strengthen provider and community partnerships through network development.

**Discussion:** Community partners and private providers are essential to the work of the department, but the Top to Bottom Review revealed that relationships between the department and outside providers and community partners need improvement. The department has hired a Director of Network Development who is responsible for refining the department's performance-based contracting and ensuring an array of evidence-based services are geographically distributed to serve clients.



Improvements in this area will provide a robust network with capacity to meet the needs of clients, ensure more effective and efficient use of resources, and improve provider relations.

**Recommendation 2:** Cultivate relationships with Foster Care Review Boards to create better community connections, provide support, and develop a system for collecting data on quality.

**Discussion:** Foster Care Review Boards advise the courts about the permanency process for children in foster care. They play an integral role in the department's work, and building stronger relationships with board members will improve the foster care system.

The department has met with Foster Care Review Boards (FCRBs) in each region and is working to develop quality indicators and direct a survey of FCRB volunteers.

**Recommendation 3:** Create monthly communication with partners and community.

**Discussion:** To increase awareness of issues and improve engagement, DCS will develop monthly communications with its stakeholders and employees. Establishing consistent and reliable communication will support the work of the department.

**Recommendation 4:** Implement In-Home Tennessee project, in partnership with the Atlantic Coast Child Welfare Implementation Center, to keep children safely in their families and communities.

**Discussion:** The In-Home Tennessee program aims to redefine and strengthen the delivery of in-home services offered to Tennessee's children and families. The program will work to help families provide safe care for their children within their homes and communities, develop effective coping



and care giving skills, gain access to and use resources to effectively meet their needs, and use service provisions to reduce repeat maltreatment.

**Recommendation 5:** Utilize data to track repeated reports of maltreatment.

**Discussion:** Child Protective Services (CPS) investigates cases of abuse or neglect. The division evaluates child safety through investigation and assessment, determines resources or services needed, and places children in care. CPS will utilize data to improve practices and reduce repeat incidents of abuse or neglect.

**Recommendation 6:** Partner with the Casey Foundation and other national experts on advancing child safety and preventing fatalities.

**Discussion:** The department is engaging national experts to look at how the health care industry has adopted strategies of high reliability organizations and how DCS could apply similar strategies.

**Recommendation 7:** Realign juvenile justice resources, track recidivism, and develop comprehensive community alternatives to maximize rehabilitation of youth.

**Discussion:** DCS has not tracked recidivism data in the past, a practice that has earned the department prior audit findings. DCS recently developed a definition of recidivism and is currently compiling research to establish baseline data. The department is also actively studying successful Juvenile Justice efforts in other states to see what lessons learned could be applied in Tennessee. As part of this effort, the department has recommended the closure of Taft Youth Development Center in FY 2013. This will save \$4.4 million annually.

**Recommendation 8:** Create Office of Performance Excellence.

**Discussion:** The Office of Performance Excellence will align quality, internal audit and human resource functions, and provide the supporting structure for a high reliability organization.

**This recommendation has been completed.**

**Recommendation 9:** Build a human resource development system which recruits, trains, and supports a qualified, high-performing workforce.

**Discussion:** The department's human resource function has historically been focused on processing. DCS is shifting its focus to provide more support for supervisors and employees. An overhaul of the training program will make it more responsive to staff feedback and more capable of meeting the organization's needs. Changes to the department's training program will save DCS approximately \$4.2 million annually.